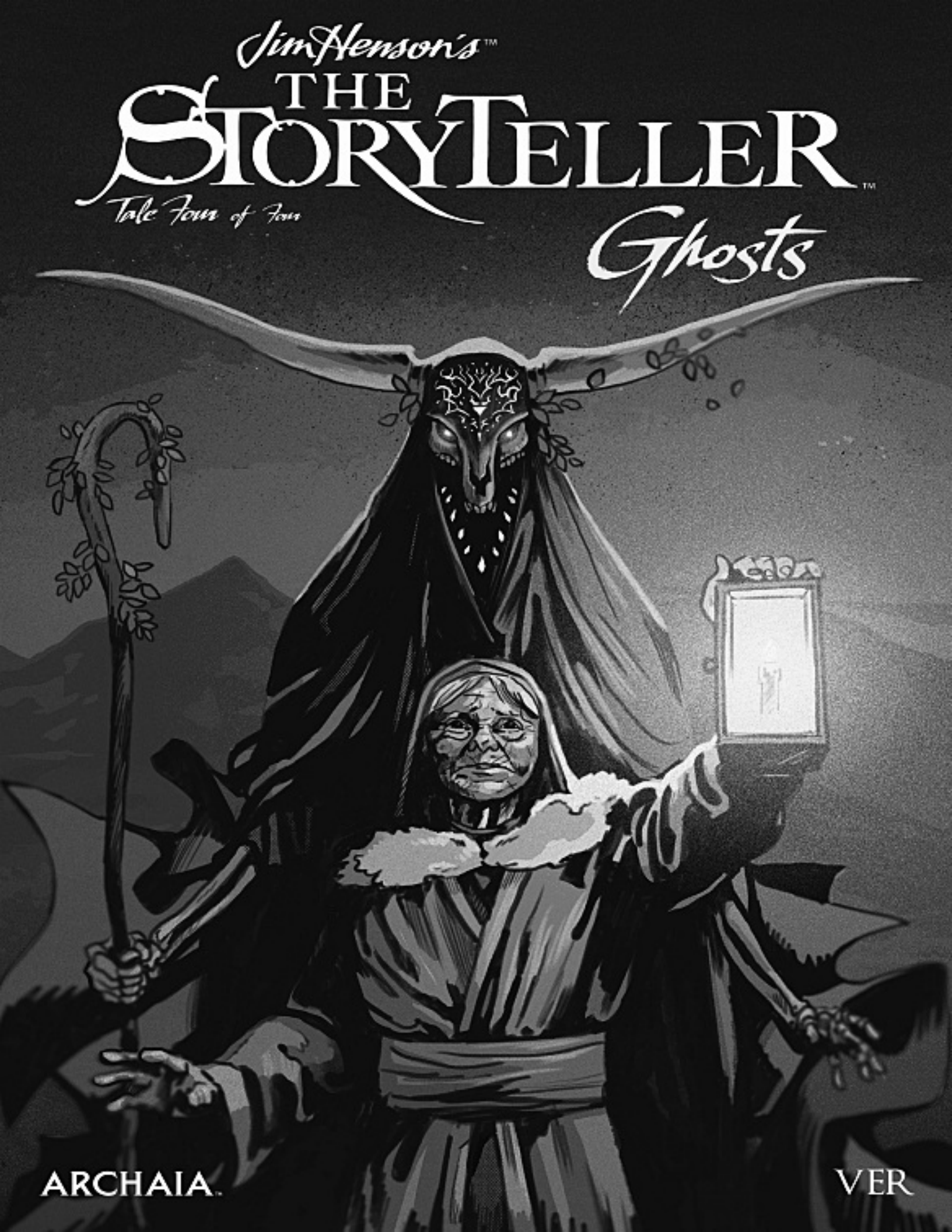
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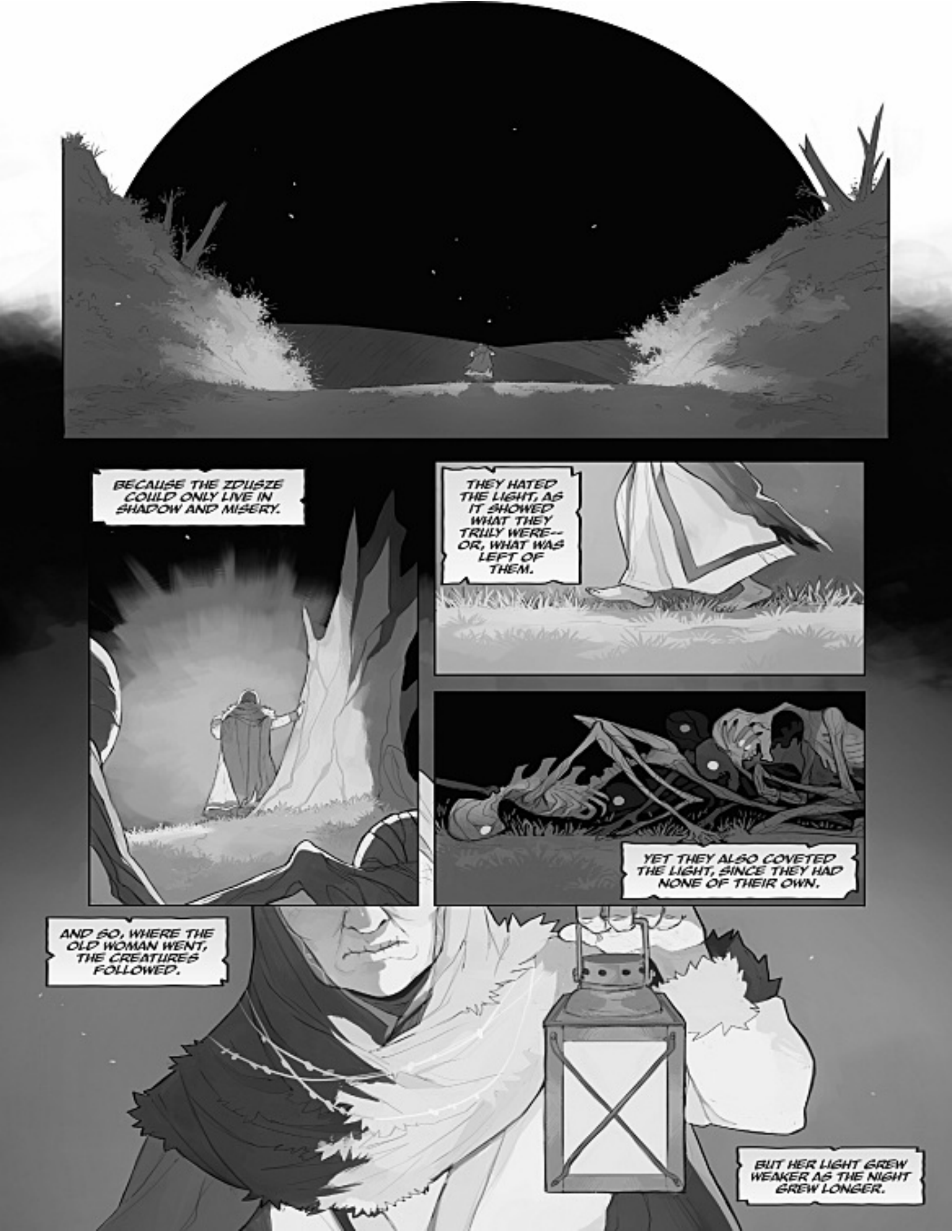
WHAT ARE YOU DOING OVER THERE?
STARGAZING, MY FRIEND! ON A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT LIKE THIS, HOW COULD I RESIST?
WOULD YOU CARE TO JOIN ME?
TO LOOK AT THE STARS? I'M SURE THEY'RE VERY PRETTY, BUT...THANK YOU, I'LL PASS.
OH, OF COURSE YOU'D THINK THEY ARE A BORE. BUT THEY HOLD MORE THAN BEAUTY ALONE.
A STARRY SKY LIKE THIS...WHY, IT REMINDS ME OF A STORY!
A STORY THAT BEGINS IN A FARAWAY LAND, WHEN THE NIGHT WAS AT ITS DARKEST...

LEAVE ME ALONE, LELEK! SHOO!
SMALL AND PLAYFUL AS YOU ARE... I WILL NOT FOLLOW YOU INTO THIS NIGHT.
I MAY BE OLD, BUT I AM NOT FOOLISH.
YOU CARRY YOUR TUNES, I CARRY A PROMISE-- TO RETURN HOME.

MY FAMILY IS TRAVELING VERY FAR TO SEE ME. I WON'T HAVE THEM WAIT FOR ME IN MY OWN HOUSE!
SING ALL YOU WANT. A PROMISE IS--
...A PROMISE...

THE OLD WOMAN KNEW WHAT STALKED HER.
PROMISED...
PROMISE...
...A...PROMISE...
...I PROMISED...
AAAAAA...
...PROMISED...
...A...PROMISE...
...I PROMISED...
AAAA...
WICKED, MINDLESS THINGS IN THE DARKEST NIGHT...
...I PROMISED...
...PROMISED...
...A PROMISE...
...PROMISED...
...AAAA...
...I PROMISED...
...THE ZDUSZE.
YOU MOCK ME?!
...PROMISED...!!
...I PROMISED...
...I PROM...
...PROMISED...
...I PROMISED...
...AAAAA...
...A PROMISE...
...I PROMISED...
...AAAAA...
...PROMISE...
...AAAAA...
...PROMISED...
...PROMISE...
PROMISEEUGH...
BEGONE! FOUL THINGS! DARK THINGS!
BUT LIGHT WOULD KEEP THEM AT BAY.
...AAA...
...PROMISED...
...PROMISED...
...AAAAA...
...PROMISE...
...I PROMISED...
AAAAA...


BECAUSE THE ZDUSZE COULD ONLY LIVE IN SHADOW AND MISERY.
THEY HATED THE LIGHT, AS IT SHOWED WHAT THEY TRULY WERE-- OR, WHAT WAS LEFT OF THEM.
YET THEY ALSO COVETED THE LIGHT, SINCE THEY HAD NONE OF THEIR OWN.
AND SO, WHERE THE OLD WOMAN WENT, THE CREATURES FOLLOWED.
BUT HER LIGHT GREW WEAKER AS THE NIGHT GREW LONGER.

THE ZDUBZE... I DON'T LIKE THEM ONE BIT!
AND YET, THEY WERE THE LEAST OF THE OLD WOMAN'S CONCERNS.
BEINGS MUCH MORE POWERFUL WALKED IN THAT NIGHT--BEINGS THAT EVEN THOSE WICKED SOULS WERE SCARED OF!
MORE POWERFUL...? WHAT WERE THEY?
THOSE WHO WALKED BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, AND DEALT IN THE LATTER MOST FREELY.

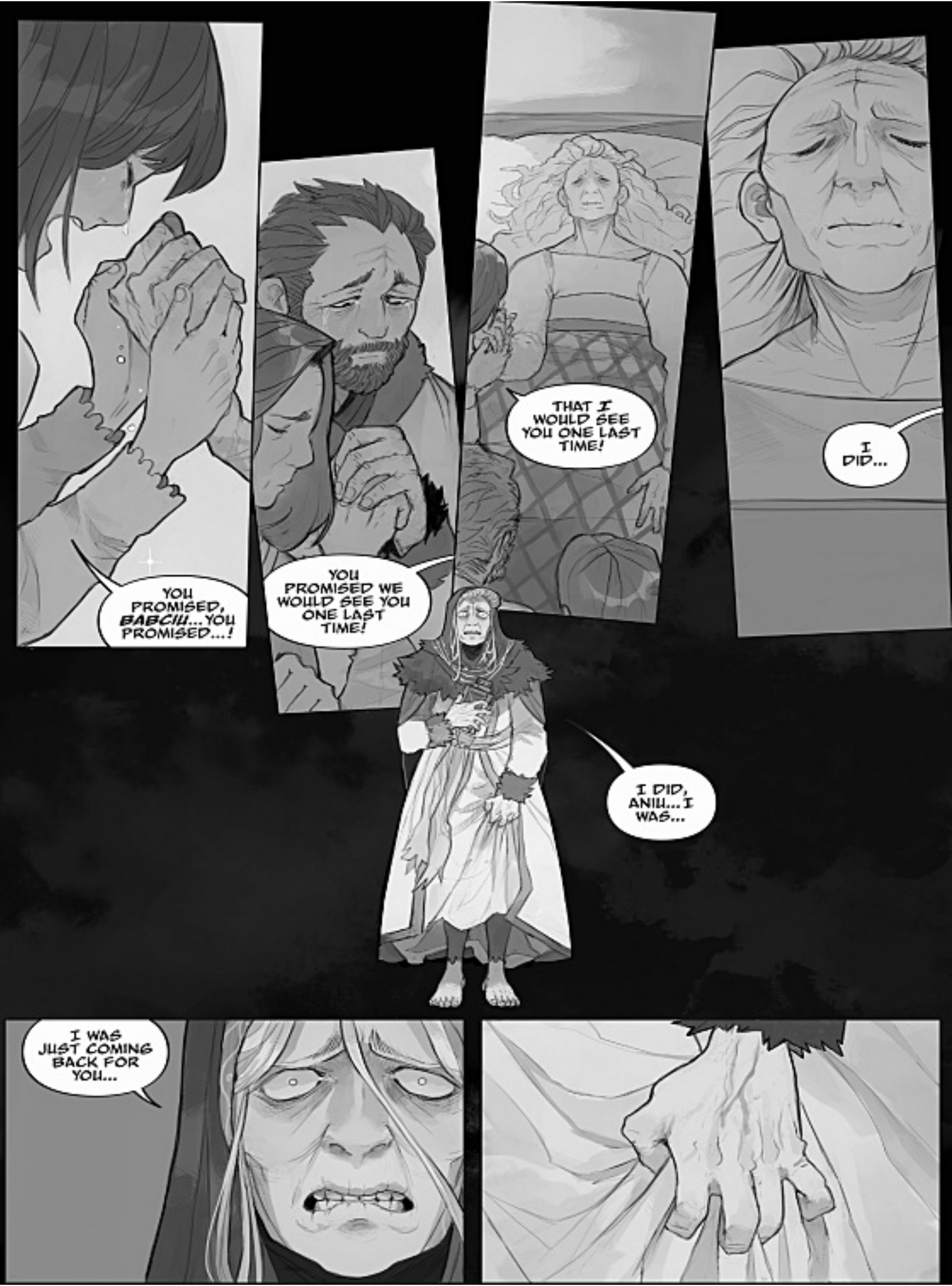
LIGHTS! HEAVENS, I'M LATE AFTER ALL!
Oh, THEY MUST BE WORRIED SICK.
OF COURSE I'D GO WANDERING OFF ON THE NIGHT THEY ARRIVE.
MAYBE THE LITTLE LELEK BIRD WAS RIGHT TO TAKE ME FOR A FOOL.
AFTER ALL, I WAS...

I WAS...
...GOING SOMEWHERE...
I NEEDED TO TAKE THIS LANTERN THERE...
I NEEDED TO...
LL..
AFTER ALL..
I WAS...
ALL..
A FOOL...!
AAA...A.
I WAS...
...A FOOL...
AAA..A FOOL...
I WAS...A
AAA.
AFTER ALL
I WAS...
AFC
AA-

AAEEEHHHHH
OOUUUDD
RAAAA
OOUHeUUU
AAA
AAA
AAA

AAAUU
DESPERATE AS THEY WERE, THE ZDUSZE COULD NOT BREAK THROUGH THE LIGHT OF THE LIVING.
!GOOO
AAUU!!
AA!
UUAA!
UOOO!
HUFF
HUFF
CREEEAK

I'M...
I'M HOME...!
I'M HOME, JUST AS I...
JUST AS I...
PROMISED...


YOU PROMISED, BABCIU... YOU PROMISED...!
YOU PROMISED WE WOULD SEE YOU ONE LAST TIME!
THAT I WOULD SEE YOU ONE LAST TIME!
I DID...
I DID, ANIU... I WAS...
I WAS JUST COMING BACK FOR YOU...

CRACK!!!
I PROMISED...
TH-MP!
I PROMISED!

IN THAT DARKEST NIGHT, THE PLACE BETWEEN OUR WORLD AND THE NEXT, VELES, THE GOD OF DEATH HIMSELF, HAD FOUND THE OLD WOMAN AT LAST.
ERRANT SPIRIT!
THE SOUL SHEPHERD HIMSELF HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU.

YOU ESCAPED THE WALK TO THE PROCESSION OF SOULS, AND NOW--
YOU HAVE SENT US ON A FINE CHASE IN THIS DARKEST NIGHT.
YOUR LIGHT IS FADING.
I PROMISED HER I WOULD SEE HER ONE MORE TIME...
YOU MUST JOIN THE OTHER DEAD.
YOU HAVE TO GO.

I PROMISED!!
NO!

UNFINISHED BUSINESS. THAT'S WHY SHE STRAYED FROM THE PROCESSION...
...AREUUHHH HAAUUU...
SHE IS ALREADY TURNING, MY LORD. SHE WILL BE A ZDUSZA--A LINGERING SOUL. SHE WILL JOIN THE THINGS IN THE DARKEST NIGHT.
JUST GIVE US THE WORD, MY LORD.
IN HIS WISDOM, VELES KNEW WHAT MUST BE DONE.
YES.

TAKE HER TO THE PROCESSION. DRAG HER BACK, IF YOU MUST.
MY LORD, WE MUST NOT ENDANGER THE OTHER SOULS...!
UUUOOHHHHH...
VUOOGHH
MIND YOUR RANK, EMBER. DO NOT QUESTION MY JUDGMENT.
THE HOLLOW FATE OF A ZDUSZA WAS MEANT FOR THOSE WHO WERE WICKED...
MAKE HASTE, AND LET HER HEAD THE PROCESSION.
...NOT FOR THOSE WHO WERE LOST.
A STWORZE LIKE YOURSELF DOES NOT HAVE MY GIFT OF SIGHT.
AND VELES WAS A SHEPHERD WHO PROTECTED HIS WARDS.
THERE IS HOPE FOR HER YET.

AAAA...
...AAAU...?
WOOOOSH
WOOF

YOU SEE, A PROMISE IS A POWERFUL THING.
IT CARRIES ON EVEN IN OUR ABSENCE.
ANIU!
BABCIU...
SOMETIMES, IT IS THE ONLY THREAD BETWEEN THOSE WHO REMAIN, AND THOSE WHO ARE GONE.
BABCIU!

UNRAVELED IN THE BITTERSWEET SENTIMENT OF A LAST GOODBYE...

...AND IN THE DARKEST NIGHT, DRAWN TO AN END, IN THE LIGHT OF A THOUSAND SOULS AND A THOUSAND STARS.

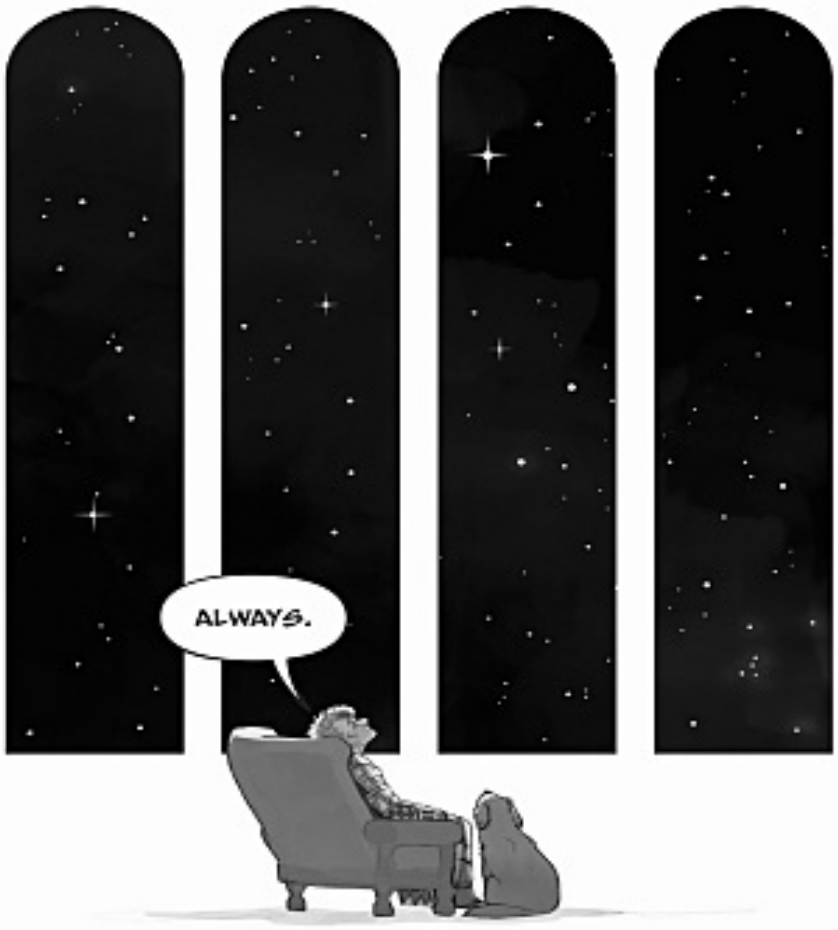
ARE THESE THE SAME STARS? THE ONES FROM YOUR STORY?

THEY CAPTURE THE HOPES AND DREAMS OF SO MANY PEOPLE, DON'T THEY?
IT'S WHY I LIKE LOOKING AT THEM.

...

...COULD I JOIN YOU?

OF COURSE, MY FRIEND.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THE END.

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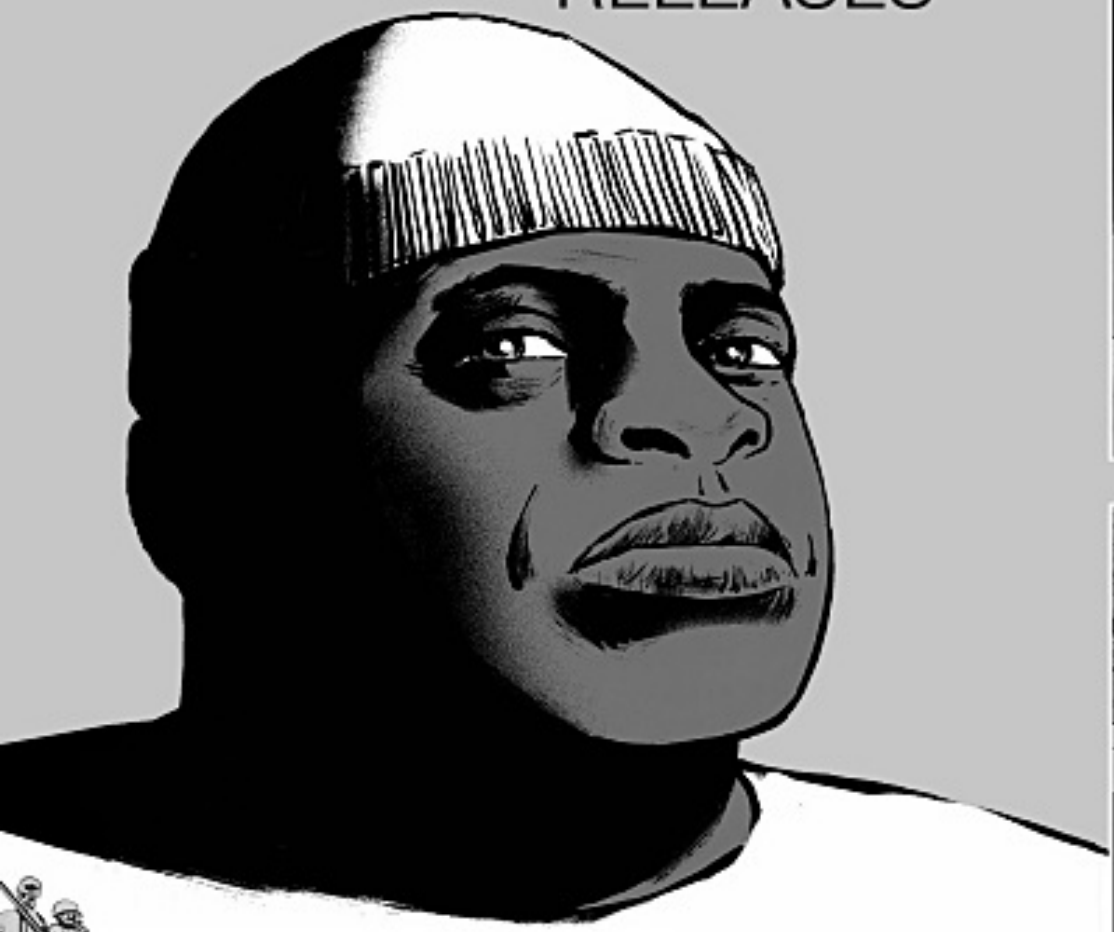

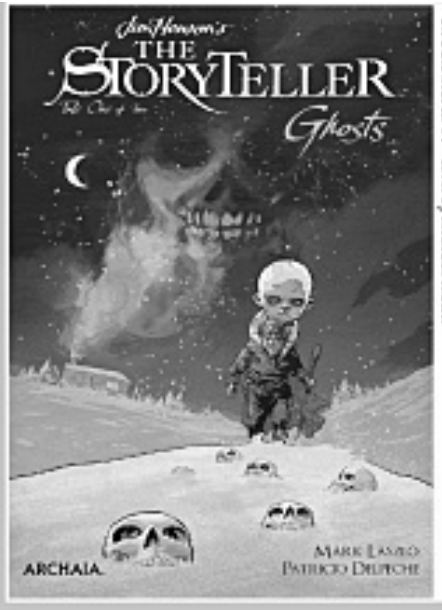

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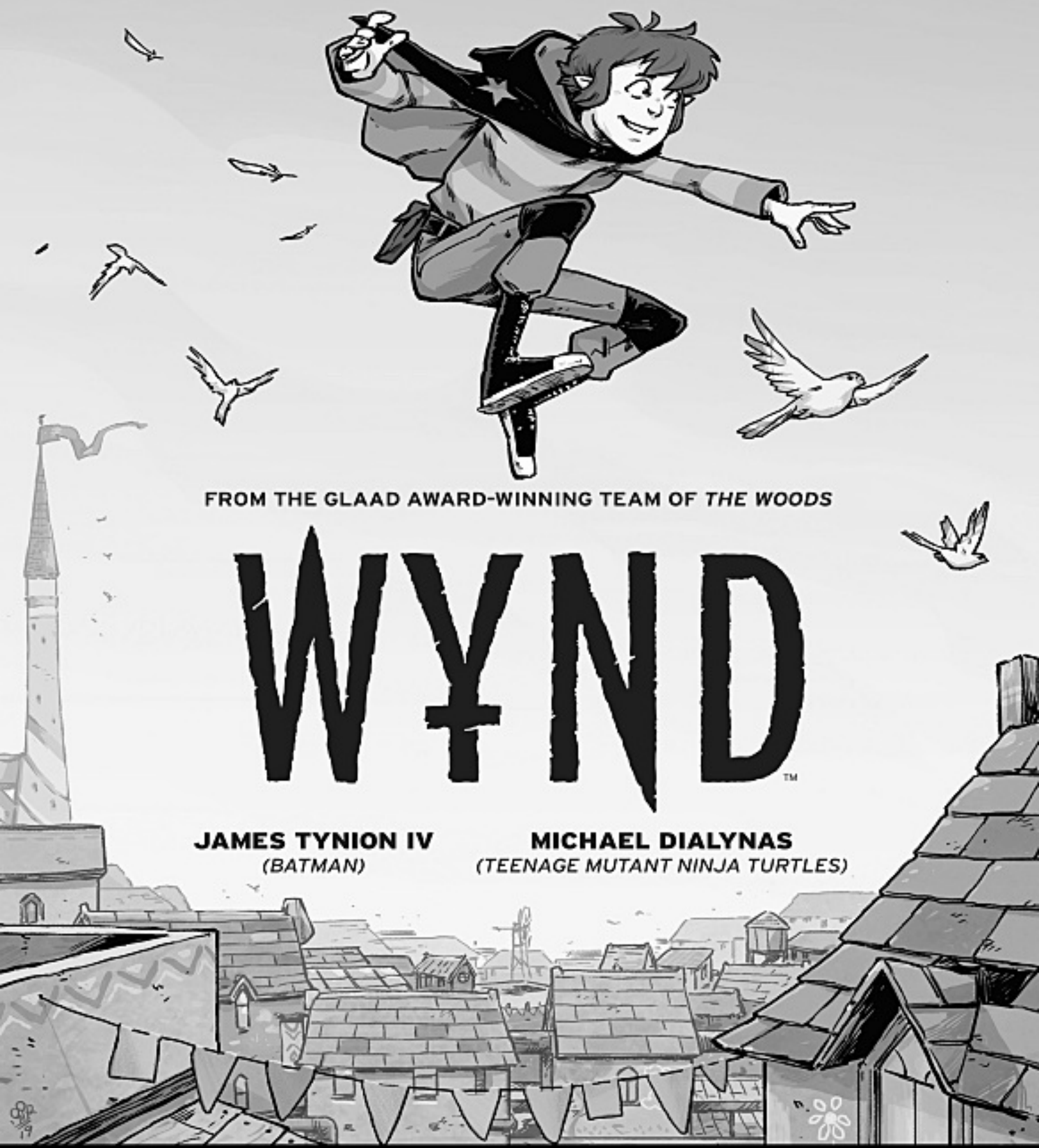
UNTIL YOU FIND YOURSELF



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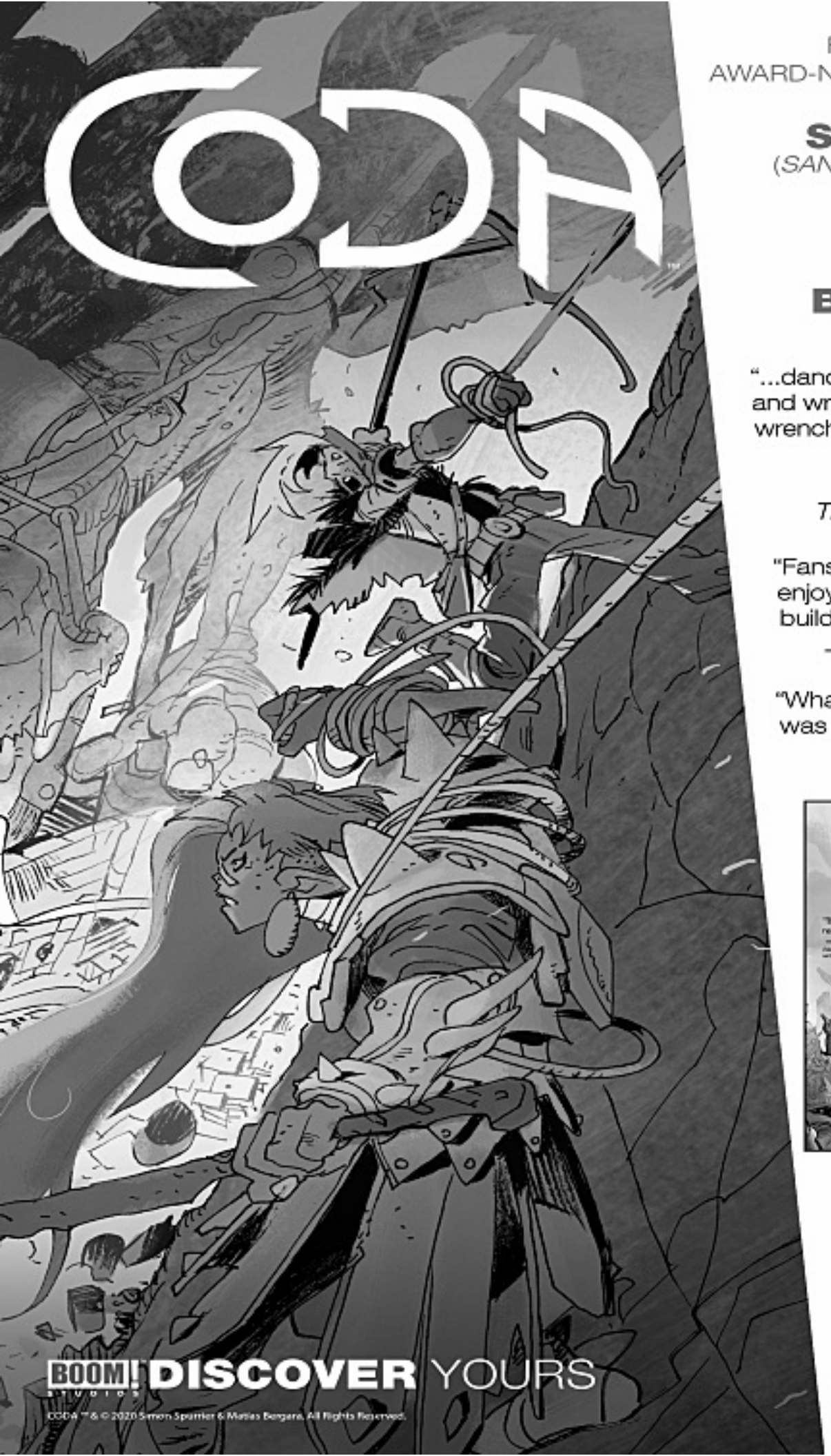

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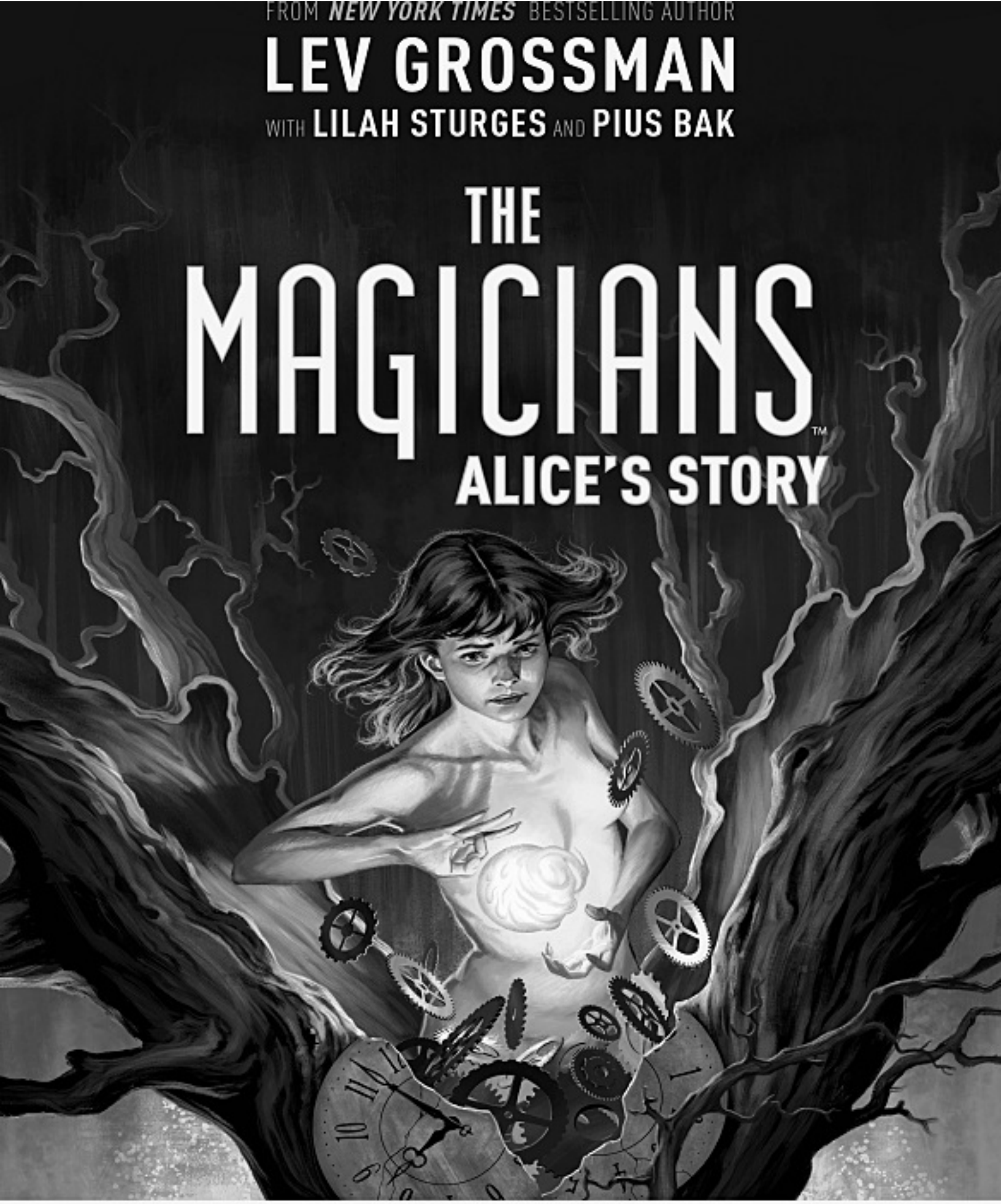

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